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ABSTRACT

This report analyzes contradictions in policies of equal educational opportunities, using Finland and Britain as examples. The analysis focuses on the relation of intended to actual policy and considers policies within the context of 1980s curriculum development. During that period, Finland gradually decentralized educational decision making, and Britain's 1988 Educational Reform Act originated the National Curriculum. The second chapter describes the Finnish context and the role of gender and equal opportunities in Finland's comprehensive school curriculum. Curriculum documents do not support the policy of promoting equal gender opportunities. The third chapter discusses the British educational policy and documents of the British National Curriculum and the status of equal opportunities within it. Although there is more sensitivity to gender issues in the British material, the stature of equal opportunities issues is equally ambiguous. The fourth chapter summarizes similarities and differences between the two countries' educational policies and discusses the contexts influencing recent restructuring efforts. Except for centralization levels, choice and accountability goals govern each country's educational rhetoric; although administration is delegated, expenditure cuts constrain the possibilities of the educational process. In neither country has equality been discussed as a dimension of accountability. (Contains 107 references.) (MLH)

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Elina Lahelma

POLICIES OF GENDER AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: DISCUSSING THE SITUATION IN FINLAND AND BRITAIN

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Policies of Gender and Equal Opportunities in Curriculum Development: Discussing the Situation in Finland and Britain

by Elina Lahelma

Abstract

This report analyses the contradictions in the policies of equal opportunities in education, by using Finland and Britain as examples. First, the report describes the Finnish context and the role of gender and equal opportunities in the curriculum of the Finnish comprehensive school. The analysis suggests that curriculum documents do not give support to the policy of promoting equality of opportunities for girls and boys. Secondly, the report discusses the British educational policy and documents of the new National Curriculum, and the status of equal opportunities within it. There is more sensitivity to gender issues in the British than in the Finnish material. The stature of issues of equal opportunities is, however, ambiguous in the British material as well. The final part of the report includes a summary in which parallels between the countries in question are suggested. The analysis is considered in the context of restructuring of education that has taken place in Britain and, a little later, in Finland.

Key words: curriculum, equal opportunities, gender, educational policy

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this report I will describe and discuss recent policies of equal opportunities and gender, within Finnish and British educational contexts. The methods used and material collected for this report differ from the one country to the other. The report is, hence, not a comparative analysis. It is, rather, a working paper that aims to demonstrate some interesting similarities and differences that need further analysis. The intention of the paper is to introduce the context for the research project 'Citizenship, Difference and Marginality in Schools - With Special Reference to Gender'. In the project, processes of gender construction in school will be examined. The project will be cross-cultural: joint projects will take place in Finland (Gordon, 1993) and in Britain (Holland, 1993).

1.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND POLICIES

During recent decades, research on gender and education has revealed analogous tendencies in many Western countries. Research conducted in various countries has revealed that gender differences and inequalities prevail in school

processes while equalization of formal access to education has taken place (Wilson, 1991; Baudelot and Establet, 1992). Girls' under-recruitment in mathematics, science and technology is one of the fundamental cross-national issues that remains a major concern (Byrne, 1987, 16). Gender bias in school material is well documented by research done in several countries (e.g. Michél, 1986). Classroom observations show boys' domination in co-educational settings (e.g. Clarricoates, 1978; Kelly, 1986). Consequently, the curriculum and processes and practices in educational institutions reproduce traditional forms of masculinity and femininity and gender inequality.

At the same time as there has been a development of research on gender and education, there has been an inclusion of the promotion of equality of opportunities for girls and boys in the educational policies of most European countries. This has especially resulted from the resolutions of the United Nations' Women's Decade. Both centrally initiated strategies and grass-root innovations have taken place under the umbrella of equal opportunities. (Weiner ed., 1990; Wilson ed., 1991.)

Discussion of the concepts used has also been intense (see e.g. Arnot, 1991; Kruse, 1992). Equal opportunities in the narrow meaning means *equal access* to education or *equal treatment* in educational institutions. However, most of the people who are committed to working with the issues of equal opportunities have interpreted the concept with a broader meaning. The aim has been to create *equal educational outcome*. The problem is, that educational outcome was never clearly defined, especially in relation to the structural inequalities of an advanced capitalist economy, as Arnot (1991, 455) has remarked. In another interpretation of the concept emphasis has been placed on the importance of striving for practices that change the content of education so that it actively supports more egalitarian gender relations. This means that equality in society is promoted *through* education, not only equality *in* education (Wernersson, 1991).

Analysis of educational policy in various countries also suggests different and contradictory interpretations of the concept 'equal opportunities' in political resolutions and practices (Byrne, 1989). A central question is whether

gender is regarded as an educational issue and sexism as an educational problem or not. There is not a great deal of research on the longterm influence of intervention projects on equal opportunities, nor on overall changes that have taken place in the educational policies of various countries in this respect (Kenway 1990). Nor is there much evidence whether changes or improvements are located in the mainstream or the system, or whether they have remained pilot experiments and peripheral. This is one of the questions that has to be asked if we want to decide whether the progress has been significant (c.f. Byrne 1987).

A further question addresses the relation of *intended policy* of equal opportunities to *actual policy* and *policy-in-use*. According to Ball and Bowe (1992), intended policy means the variety of 'official', often competing ideologies that seek to affect policy. In most Western countries, equal opportunities has been one of the official ideologies of education during the last few decades. Actual policy is policy in texts; the wording of legislation, circulars and policy documents. Policy-in-use refers to institutional practices and discourses that emerge from the responses of practioners to both intended and actual policies.

1.2 PRESENTATION OF THIS REPORT

This report analyses the contradictions in the policies of equal opportunities in education, by using Finland and Britain as examples. The analysis focuses on the relation of the intended policy of equal opportunities to actual policy in both countries. These policies are considered in the context of curriculum development in the eighties. At that period in Finland, gradual decentralization of educational decisions started, while in Britain the Educational Reform Act of 1988 (ERA) originated the National Curriculum (NC). In both countries, however, economic cuts and change towards marketing ideology will have a strong impact on education in the nineties.

In the second chapter of this report I will describe the actual policy of equal opportunities, which is demonstrated in the curriculum of the Finnish comprehensive school. The material explored consists of curriculum documents, published by the National Board of Education in the late eighties, and other educational policy documents. I also utilize the tacit knowledge that I have gained in the eighties, when I was working on a Commission on Equal Opportunities in Education. The analysis is based on my previous research on gender differentiation in the curriculum of the Finnish comprehensive school (Lahelma, 1992). A part of it is also presented in an report submitted to the journal Gender and Education (Lahelma, 1993). In analysing the documents, I have considered both the ideas and messages emerging from the text and the less visible ideological implications of the subtext. Thus I explore the messages of the documents and, at the same time, treat the texts as ideological and political artefacts constructed within a specific historical and political context (see Burton & Weiner, 1990).

The third chapter discusses the British educational policy and documents of National Curriculum, and the status of equal opportunities within it. The Department of Education and Science has published an enormous amount of material relating to the Educational Reform Act and the National Curriculum. I have personally examined the most central documents, and partly used secondary sources, that is, analysis and critiques of the reform conducted by British researchers. The British material was collected in autumn 1992 and spring 1993 during my stay as a visiting fellow at the University of Surrey, England.

The fourth chapter of the report includes a summary in which parallels between the countries in question are suggested. I will also consider the messages of curricular documents in the context of restructuring that has taken place in Britain and, a little later, in Finland. The report concludes with some challenges for further research, in which relations of actual policy and policy-in-use will be made an issue.

2 FINLAND

2.1 DESCRIBING THE FINNISH CONTEXT

To introduce the context where the analysis takes place, I will describe, first, the curriculum system of the Finnish comprehensive school, focusing on questions that are gender relevant. Secondly, I will describe how the intended policy of gender equality has affected the discourses in education during the last two decades.

Gender differentiation in a centralized comprehensive school

In Finland, we have a long tradition of a centralized school system, which started to move towards decentralization in the eighties (c.f. Antikainen, 1990, 77). Comprehensive School Reform took place in Finland in 1972-77. The school system after the reform was highly centralized. One of the underlying ideologies behind centralization was that of equality of opportunities; the same curriculum and equal resources must be provided to everyone regardless of gender, social background or region.

The Committee that formulated the national curriculum for the comprehensive school made only a few explicit remarks on gender. It did, however, suggest a common syllabus for girls and boys, and co-educational settings. (ME, 1970.) After the reform, all schools for 7-16 year olds became co-

educational with a common core curriculum. Selection, content and time allocation for subjects were nationally prescribed.

In the 1980s, a marked change occurred in the planning ideology. Decentralization took place in educational planning and decision making, at least on the level of intended policy. Development happened in small steps, and planning relied more on negotiations than on research. Greater reliance was placed on market forces. (Antikainen, 1990.) However, the intended policy was not easily transformed into actual policy. Curriculum Framework for Comprehensive School (NBE, 1985) was presumed to be the first step in the direction of decentralization. It was prepared by the National Board of Education, the Finnish governmental authority for school education. The local authorities were supposed to develop, for the first time, their own curricula using the guide-lines of the Curriculum Framework. Most of the local curricula, however, do not differ significantly from the national framework (Atjonen, 1989). In her research on implementation of Curriculum Framework in schools, Atjonen (1993, 251-253) concluded, that there were encouraging indications that the new system can be used as a springboard for further activities designed to improve the school system. However, some doubt emerged as to whether a locally devised curriculum can provide optimal resources for development at the level of the individual school. Ball and Bowe (1992) have found out how different histories and contingencies of institutions, among other things, have their impact on the way in which reforms are implemented. In Finland, with the tradition of centralized planning, local authorities and schools did not have the history and contingencies for curriculum innovation. They asked for more detailed guide-lines. The National Board of Education produced, in the late eighties, about 30 Teachers' Guide Books for various subjects and permeating themes.

Despite the tendency of decentralization, the selection of subjects and the amount of time allocated for each subject were still nationally prescribed in the Curriculum Framework of 1985. Physical education is the only gender-segregated subject with differentiated aims and contents. Subject choices differentiate the curriculum slightly. From the fourth year (pupils aged 9-10) up to the

seventh every pupil has to study either textile handicraft (needle work) or industrial arts. In the eighth and ninth year, children obtain six hours of training a week in three subjects which they choose from a selection of ten. Most popular have been information technology, home economics, foreign languages, textile handicrafts (only among girls), industrial arts (only among boys) and business studies. Home-economics in the seventh and family education in the ninth year are taught for both girls and boys. The total number of hours for home-economics and family education is, together, less than 2% of the instructional hours in comprehensive school. (NBE, 1985.)

The teaching of mathematics and sciences is the same for all pupils in comprehensive school. In gymnasium (academic post-16 education) which about half of the youth attend after comprehensive school, pupils can choose between more or less extensive courses in these subjects. Pupils who choose less extensive courses in mathematics and physics, usually opt for one or two optional languages, in addition to the two compulsory languages.

National statistics from comprehensive schools and gymnasiums suggest that boys, more often than girls, choose industrial arts, information technology, mathematics and physics. Girls are more likely to choose textile handicraft, home economics, languages and psychology. Crafts are almost totally segregated by gender, with only 3% of girls choosing industrial arts and 1% of boys choosing textile handicraft. (Lahelma, 1992.)

Gender differences in option choice in gymnasium have an impact on further choices, as extensive courses in mathematics and physics more often than courses in optional languages are used as criteria for selection to further and higher education. The most important fields of vocational education, where mathematics or physics are not required, are the female-dominated ones of health and social care. Those fields are the most difficult to enter. Therefore, though the average grades obtained by girls at school are higher than those obtained by boys, girls are less likely to be admitted to further and higher education to study subjects of their choice. (Lahelma, 1990 and 1992.) Consequently, differences in boys' and girls' choices cancel out the on average better achievement of girls in school, whether this is used as a conscious

method or not. Analogously, the research of Mar-Molinero (1991) suggests that in Britain it is easier to enter higher education to study science and technology than subjects that women are more often interested in.

Intended policies of education are visible in a recent planning document of the Ministry of Education that was accepted by the Government in 1993 (ME, 1993). In this document, more emphasis is given to pupils' opportunities to choose subjects in comprehensive education. The impact of choices is not discussed from the perspective of equality.

One chararcteristic of the Finnish comprehensive school system, relevant for this analysis, is the lack of any national assessment before the age of 19, when those who have attended the gymnasium take the Matriculation examination. Before that, the evaluation of pupils' achievement is made individually by teachers as opposed to national testing. While the emphasis on accountability in education is growing in the nineties, the need for scrutinizing the possibilities of national assessment has been raised. It is not so far, however, central in current plans for education (see e.g., ME, 1993; NBE, 1992).

Top-down policy of equal opportunities

In Finland, some aspects of formal equality for men and women have been achieved earlier than in many other countries. Today half of the labour force are women. Unlike other countries with high female participation in the labour force, in Finland only a minority of employed women work part-time. There is a strong ideology of equality of opportunity backed by legislation. The welfare state has so far guaranteed considerable public day-care provision[1]. Cultural codes and ideological rhetoric do not place mothers of young children at home. Yet the horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market is

[1] Today, however, the economic situation has worsened rapidly, and the extent of the provision of public daycare is challenged.

comparable to other Western countries and the income of women is less than 75% of that of men.

The participation of girls and women in education has been on a high level as well. Already in the early fifties girls outnumbered boys in gymnasium. In vocational and university education, female majorities have existed from the mid-eighties. In the early nineties, the percentage of girls has been 56-58% in gymnasium, and in vocational and university education. Girls' achievement in school is, on average, better than boys'. Gender segregation in the fields of vocational and university education is, however, stable, and has not shown many signs of change.

Equal opportunities, in general terms, has been defined as one of the aims of education (ME, 1973). However, still in the early eighties, gender was not regarded as a relevant category of educational inequality; emphasis in policies and in educational research was more on inequalities caused by social background and place of residence. Nor was equal opportunities for girls and boys an issue of concern for teachers. Formal equal opportunities in access were regarded as satisfactory, and actual differences in subject choices and behaviour of girls and boys were regarded, rather, as natural consequences of biological sex differences. Because problems, such as poor achievement, lack of motivation and disruptive behaviour, were more common among boys than girls, concern was (and is) often expressed about the feminization of education or the difficulties confronted by boys in schools. (Gordon, Lahelma & Tarmo, 1991; Gordon, 1992.)

The obligation to promote gender equality was included in school legislation for the first time in 1978 and it was defined as one of the aims of education in 1983. The law of equal opportunities (1987) also assigned responsibilities to school authorities for promoting equality. The references to equality were included in the legislation not as a result of persuasion from the educational field, but, rather, as an answer to the challenge of international resolutions of the Women's Decade. Gender was taken up as an issue in school research and educational policy only in the eighties. Even then it was first launched by a Commission of Equal Opportunities in Education, set up by the

Ministry of Education in 1983. Initiated by the Commission, a research network was created, a guide book for teachers (Haataja, Lahelma & Saarnivaara, 1989) and some other material were produced and the first intervention projects in schools and teacher education started. Although the projects were centrally initiated and financed, most of them got backing from committed activists in the field (Lahelma & Ruotonen, 1992). In 1991 the Ministry of Education accepted an Action Plan on Equal Opportunities in Education. The latest projects in the nineties have been integrated in NORD-LILIA, which is a Nordic project for promoting equal opportunities in teacher education, supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Gutt eller jente, 1992).

The question of educational equality has been addressed by taking into account the impact of school education on reproduction of societal gender relations. The Commission of Equal Opportunities placed emphasis on the importance of striving for practices that change the contents of education so that they actively support more egalitarian gender relations. The aim was to promote equality *through* education, not only equality *in* education. (Lahelma, 1987; ME, 1988; Salonen ed., 1988; Haataja, Lahelma & Saarnivaara, 1989.)

The policy is an example of top-down policy, where measures of equal opportunities are implemented through centralized decisions. Such policies have often been criticized by feminists (see e.g. Kenway, 1990). In Finland, this policy was in accordance with our tradition of centralized curriculum decision making. In a small country, with personal ties between people working in different levels, the formal structures of top-down policies have, however, intermingled with informal structures.

2.2 GENDER AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN FINNISH CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

Curriculum Framework for Comprehensive School (NBE, 1985), almost 300 pages long, introduces general pedagogic principles, guide-lines for teaching

methods and assessment, and detailed suggestions for syllabuses for different school subjects. Additionally, in the late eighties, the National Board of Education published about thirty teachers' guide books for various subjects or permeating themes. The Curriculum Framework and guide books present requirements that have to be taken into account in all schools, but also more general ideas that are intended to help local authorities, schools, teachers and authors of school books in their work.

As was suggested above, national and international discussion and research on gender questions was lively in the early eighties. On the level of intended policy, equal opportunities was defined as one of the educational goals. Does this intended policy of equal opportunities have influence on the actual policy? This was questioned by examining curriculum documents as examples of actual policy.

References to gender issues in pedagogical guide-lines

First, I explored how gender and equal opportunities were defined and described in the pedagogical guide-lines of the curriculum documents. This was done in order to question whether the material gives any support for the view that gender is an educational issue that must be taken into account in schools.

In the Finnish curriculum framework for comprehensive school, the obligation to promote equal opportunities was defined, together with other goals for education, as a principle to guide teaching. According to the document, appropriate ways to achieve the goal can be acquired in each educational situation and specific guide-lines for methods cannot be written down in the curriculum. Included in the document was also a text of sixteen lines about equal opportunities. In this text, respect for all people, equal possibilities to choose and participate, and the importance of changing attitudes of pupils were emphasized (NBE, 1985, 13). The text does not give any reason for teachers to question whether their former practices need modification.

More detailed examination of the curriculum material does not uncover many references. A conspicuous feature in all the pedagogical guide-lines in the documents was the almost total absence of gender; there are 'pupils' in the schools, not boys or girls. The few instances when direct remarks about girls or boys were made seem arbitrary. Most of the references also indicate that gender differences are interpreted as natural: "Research has proved that, because of natural physiological differences, boys need more space than girls" (NBE, 1988 a, 15, translation EL), or: "A female student of secondary level who says 'I cannot stand boys' may express her displeasure because boys are not interested in her" (NBE, 1987, 46, translation EL). Both examples support the attitude that teachers need not intervene, if girls do not feel comfortable in the school.

The term equal opportunity was mentioned a few times in the pegagogic guide-lines of the curriculum documents, and each reference suggests a different interpretation of the concept. It was used, for example, as an argument for the gender-differentiated goals and content of physical education (NBE, 1985, 175), as an argument for co-education in home economics (NBE, 1985, 225) and for the opportunity to choose between industrial arts and textile handicrafts (NBE, 1988 b, 26). In another article (Lahelma, 1993) I have analysed the underlying interpretations of equality of opportunities within different quotations.

Equally important to what is said in the documents is what is *not* said. The prevailing gender bias in the selection of optional subjects or its impact on further choices are not taken into account anywhere. Although there is a great deal of research on teachers' differentiated perceptions and treatment of girls and boys, the documents did not include comments on that. Although gender differences in achievement are well documented in research, they were not mentioned in the guide-lines for pupil assessment. Consequently, the hidden mechanisms that affect inequalities in practices and processes of schools, are not dealt with in the documents. They remain hidden in the actual policies of education, bringing about disjunction between intended policy of equal opportunities and actual policy.

Women's experience in curriculum contents

Secondly, I analysed suggestions in the Curriculum Framework for the contents for different subjects. Do they provide opportunities for the presentation of sufficiently relevant information on the life and experiences of women? If we use the terms of Yates (1985; see also Connell, 1992), the question is about 'gender inclusiveness' of the curriculum.

The suggestions for the content of different subjects were mostly lists of themes both in the Curriculum Framework and, in more detail, in Teachers' Guidebooks. There were only a few references to gendered persons. In suggestions for history and religious education, however, a couple of men and one woman (a queen) were mentioned. According to the framework, the perspectives of children and women should be included in the micro history part in the history syllabus (NBE, 1985, 133.) This emphasis was, however, not prominent in the list of the themes. Evidently it has not influenced the authors of school text books. In my research on three regularly used fifth year school text books on history, I did not find inclusion of women's history; women were absent not only in macro history sections of the text books, but also when the everyday life of ordinary people was described, i.e. in micro historical parts of the books (Lahelma, 1992).

Gender or gender inequality themes were not listed in the suggestions for any compulsory subjects before the eighth year of schooling (14 year olds). Equal opportunities, sex or sex roles were among the hundreds of subtitles for history and vocational guidance in the eighth year and for social education and vocational guidance in the ninth year. (NBE, 1985.) No specifications for the contents or teaching methods of the themes were included.

The term 'equal opportunities' as a suggestion for contents of teaching can call for very different interpretations. I have examined how equal opportunities was presented in three school books of social education and three books of vocational guidance for eighth and ninth year pupils. In these books, gender issues were introduced as isolated items of a few paragraphs or pages. In some of the books, however, problems of equal opportunities were referred to as

marginal because of the changes made by legislation on equal opportunities. The impression given was that the remaining problems of gender inequalities are mostly due to the prejudices of girls and boys. " ... equal opportunities for the sexes advance slowly but definitely. ... (In this development) everybody can take part by abandoning prejudices and rigid sex role differentiation in choosing his/her vocation" (Hakala et al., 1989, 97, translation EL). Avoidance of expressing the author's own opinion was evident in some of the books. For example, the statistics on gender differences in the labour force and wages, as well as interviews with people with differing opinions, were presented without the author's comments or analyses. Sometimes they were followed by open questions to be discussed in the classroom. (Lahelma, 1992.) The information given in the analysed text books does not help girls or boys to understand gender relations nor give them tools for working towards a more equal society.

The analysis suggests that contents of different subjects do not include focus on women or gender inequalities. This can be interpreted as an assumption that school knowledge is gender neutral because there were not many references to men either. My examination of school text books gave examples, however, of transformation of the neutral 'person' in curriculum documents into 'man' in school textbooks (Lahelma, 1992). Another issue, relevant in analysing the contents of education, is the question of gender bias in scientific and school knowledge in more general terms (Harding, 1986; Wolpe, 1988). This issue was not examined in my research.

Curriculum documents as attempts towards gender neutrality

The curriculum materials were published during a period when discussion on gender equality had just started in Finland. This discussion has had only very unsystematic influence on the material in question. Accordingly, the rather controversial examples above suggest the difficulties in interpreting the goal of promoting equal opportunities.

These results should not, however, be interpreted only as an avoidance of carrying out the policy of equal opportunities. Rather, I conclude that in curriculum documents gender neutrality has been chosen as the method for promoting equal opportunities, although it is not consistent nor explicit.

Apart from the exceptions analysed above, avoidance of addressing gender issues was apparent in the documents. This can be interpreted as an attempt to escape stereotypical sex role labels, by speaking neutrally about 'pupils' instead of boys and girls. The fact that themes related to gender or equal opportunities were only addressed in the lists of contents for 14-year olds, can be interpreted as an emphasis on child-centred pedagogy. A belief that child development follows a sequential path, obvious in the ideology of child-centredness, leads to a conclusion that young children cannot learn to understand difficult concepts, like gender and equal opportunities (Acker, 1988; Epstein, 1993).

That gender differences in pupils' behaviour and achievement are not dealt with suggests that differences are considered as natural, for example it is natural for a girl not to be interested in technology or for a boy to act disruptively. That gender differences in option choices are not questioned can be interpreted as an assumption of free choice; interpretation that decisions made by individuals concerning school subjects or occupational expectations are freely made by the individual regardless of cultural constraints operating through the filter of gender (Diamond, 1991). Neutrality thus means simply allowing the many and powerful pressures on pupils to operate untrammelled upon them (Riddell, 1992).

The documents do not give advice or assistance to teachers on how to eliminate stereotyping from teaching or how to encourage girls and boys to broaden their perspectives. The policy is in line with the general view stated in the Curriculum Framework on the role of curriculum goals: specific instructions cannot be written. Avoidance of gender issues in guide-lines can be interpreted as based upon the assumption that teachers are aware of the policy and that it already forms part of their professional practice. Results from various countries indicate that this is not so (see e.g. Houston, 1985; Diamond,

1991; Riddell, 1992; for results of Tarmo's research in Finland, see Gordon, Lahelma & Tarmo, 1991). Even teachers' commitment to take gender as an issue in curriculm contents does not secure results that actually promote equality, unless they themselves are well informed on the issue. For example the analysis of Baker and Davies (1989) on a lesson of sex roles shows the way in which unwary teachers can sustain inequitable gender relations even when this is contrary to their intentions.

3 BRITAIN

3.1 DESCRIBING THE BRITISH CONTEXT

The change that is taking place in curriculum decision in Britain, with the implementation of the Educational Reform Act and the new National Curriculum, is essential to the analysis of curriculum documents. The policy of equal opportunities has to be analysed in this context.

Towards the National Curriculum

In the educational policy after the Educational Act of 1944 until the 1980's, schools in Britain have had more autonomy than practically any other country in planning their ethos, organization and curriculum (Fowler, 1988). This 'Secret Garden of Education' was challenged in 1976, when the Secretary of State James Callaghan initiated the 'Great Debate' on education. In his speech he directly attacked the teaching profession for failing to respond to the needs of the economy. The ideological shift to the right was accelerated and sharpened in popular and official discourse with the victory of the Conserva-

tive Party in 1979. The professionals of education were accused of the politization of the curriculum and the emphasis of 'soft' artificial subjects. It was claimed that the whole purpose of schooling has been distorted by its preoccupation with equality. The New Right pamphleteers emphasized that the 'producers'- teachers and local authorities - have taken over and pursue their own purposes at the expense of the needs of the 'consumers' of the service - the parents. They claimed that the education system must be built upon the principles of public choice and accountability. (see e.g. Ranson 1990.)

In the 1980's, a series of political decisions were leading the way to the Educational Reform Act (ERA) and the National Curriculum (NC) in 1988. The official principles within the National Curriculum are the entitlement of every child to the same opportunities, wherever they attend school, and the raising of standards of attainment throughout England and Wales. The curriculum is supposed to be broad and balanced. Ten foundation subjects are defined in the Educational Reform Act as obligatory for all pupils. Among them mathematics, science and English are described as core subjects. The aims, contents and attainment targets of foundation subjects are defined in mandatory documents. A national assessment system is provided, with summative tests at the ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. (HMSO, 1988; DES, 1989; NCC, 1990 a.)

The National Curriculum was immediately strongly criticized by teachers' organizations and researchers (e.g. Lawton & Chitty eds., 1988; Flude & Hammer eds., 1990; Kelly, 1990). The principle of core curriculum in itself has not been criticized; a common curriculum has been seen as a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition to break down educational inequalities (Arnot, 1989, 9). Lawton (1988, 10) argued that the clothes of the educational Left have been stolen by the political Right, who has filled them with different contents. The most problematic aspects of the new policies are, according to the critiques, the rigid division of subjects, their overloaded contents, and the emphasis given to testing and competition. It is an old-fashioned curriculum; Aldrich (1988) finds striking similarities with the curriculum of secondary schools of 1904.

More recently, the general dissatisfaction towards the Government's policies has expanded. In May 1993, all teachers' organizations decided to boycott the tests for 14 year olds, and the majority of parents support the teachers' decision.

Governmental rhetoric emphazises the egalitarian element in the National Curriculum: now everyone has to study the same core and foundation subjects up to the age of 16. Formerly it was possible to drop, for example, physics. The reviewers of the reform have, however, not been equally satisfied. It still is possible to choose between double or single sciences, and the choice is biased by gender (Burton & Weiner, 1990; Burrage, 1991; Davies, Holland & Minhas, 1992; Stobart, Elwood & Quinlan, 1992). Technology is one of the foundation subjects. It includes for example economics, arts and crafts. Within this subject area the specific components undertaken by pupils remain differentiated along traditional gender lines (Davies, Holland & Minhas, 1992; Riddell, 1992). Ability grouping takes place in core subjects and national examinations will not necessarily be taken in all foundation subjects by each pupil (Burrage, 1991).

Measures of assessment are vital principles in the Educational Reform Act. The inevitable comparison of individuals both with each other and with the norms generates inequalities. As the methods of testing have improved and the knowledge of gender differentiation in different kinds of tasks have accumulated it is nowadays possible to produce the kind of gender balance in achievement that is regarded as appropriate (Goldstein 1988; see Davies, Holland & Minhas, 1992, 27).

ERA also means changes in educational decision making. Schools lose autonomy in curricular decisions to the central government. At the same time, responsibility for financial management is transferred from local authorities to individual schools' governmental bodies. In these bodies, parental and employers' representation is increased. Parents are given more freedom to choose a school for their children - as well as the schools widened possibilities to select their pupils.

The ERA has been suggested by commentators to be paradoxical: it increasingly gives market forces their head within areas of policy that have previously been subject to detailed regulation and planning by central and local government, yet it suddenly introduces prescription into the one area of education where hitherto there had been autonomy. Whitty (1989, 330-331) emphasizes, that the former autonomy has been professional autonomy rather than the autonomy of consumer choice. Donald (1992, 123) remarks, that under the rubric of modernization, ERA combines a neo-liberal commitment to the free play of market forces with a neo-conservative espousal of cultural identity, authority and 'standards'. Neo-liberalism in the ERA is apparent in the transfer of responsibility for financial management to individual schools, in promotion of competition by giving parents the right to select a school and in the encouragment given to schools to 'opt out' of local educational authorities (LEAs), and in the increase of parental and employers' representation on governing bodies. Neo-conservatism is ensuring governmental control over what goes on in schools. This has been secured by testing and by the appointment of all members of the National Curriculum Commission by the secretary of state. Neo-conservatism in the form of nationalism is also strenghtened by reasserting e.g. the traditional norms of standard English and by narrative national history.

Grass-roots innovations of equal opportunities

In Britain, equal opportunities achieved official recognition as a legitimate goal of schooling for the first time in 1943, but this recognition obviously did not have a strong effect on the schooling of girls. Wolpe (1974) has analysed the official ideology of education for girls after the second World War by examining three important educational Reports (HMSO, 1943; HMSO, 1959; DES, 1963). She concluded that they showed consistently a view of the school-going population as predominantly homogeneous, boys and girls together. Where educational problems for girls were considered as distinct from those of boys,

they revealed a presupposition of the lives of girls as adults. Girls' interests were regarded as different from the interests of boys, because "the prospect of courtship and marriage should rightly influence the education of the adolescent girls ... her direct interest in dress, personal experience and in problems of human relations should be given central place in her education" (HMSO 1959, 124). Wolpe (1974) remarks, that none of the Reports make any attempt to consider or analyse the concrete facts relating to the employment of girls and women. After 1944 also overt discrimination existed: when selection for secondary education through the 11+ examinations predominated, girls' performances were weighted differently from boys' performances so that girls obtained fewer places than their results merited (Deem, 1981).

Since these reports were published, a number of factors have led to a gradual but profound shift in opinion. The factors included a growing realization of the relative disadvantage suffered by girls in schools, the influence of the modern feminist movement, and an increasing concern about skill shortages (Bridgwood and Betteridge, 1989). The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 and the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission represented an attempt to remove discrimination. Arnot (1991) analyses the policy of equal opportunities in the seventies and early eighties. At that period, numerous small scale initiatives set up by teachers and schools under the umbrella of equal opportunities were introduced. Such initiatives relied more often upon teachers' voluntary effort and commitment than upon government funding. They drew attention to the need to challenge conventional attitudes and expectations about gender roles. This approach offered strategies that suited the needs of policy-makers, particularly as far as they set up seemingly achievable targets and workable strategies within existing resources. Each in different ways offered the possibility of using teachers as agents of change within a decentralized education sytem that stressed the value of teachers and school autonomy. According to Arnot (1991, 453) change seemed to occur when teachers were already committed and willing to experiment. Yet it seems that even here, girls learned to express non-traditional attitudes but not to change their behaviour in educational and occupational choices.

Apart from the grass-roots innovations, there were, in the early eighties, some national studies focusing on gender and education. The Schools Council Sex Differentiation Project (1981-83) was one of the first of them. The principal aim of the project was persuading teachers and administrators that sexism in schools is an educational problem (Weiner, 1989). Unlike the issues of race or special needs, there was not, however, a major national report to provide a framework for policy and practice on gender issues in education (Davies, Mabbott & Thomas, 1992).

By the mid-eighties, the performance of girls and young women had improved greatly, with far more obtaining examination passes and entering higher education (Wilson, 1991). Girls' former underachievement (or the assumption about their underachievement) was more and more challenged, even in mathematics (Walkerdine, 1989). However, the hidden curriculum proved highly resistant to change (Burton & Weiner, 1990). The failure to promote extensive change in male and female option choices was evident.

The Educational Reform Act of 1988 and National Curriculum in Britain curtail both teacher autonomy and possibilities for anti-sexist innovations. In the following, I shall describe how equal opportunities is addressed in the documents of the National Curriculum.

3.2 GENDER AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN BRITISH CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

References to gender in the general guidelines

In the document material of the National Curriculum, some references to equal opportunities are made. A document of the National Curriculum Council emphasizes equal access and the climate of school to support equality: "In order to make access to the whole curriculum a reality for all pupils, schools need to foster a climate in which equality of opportunity is supported by a

whole school policy to which the whole school subscribes, and in which positive attitudes to gender equality are actively promoted." (NCC, 1990 a).

Curriculum includes cross-curricular elements, called themes, dimensions and skills. Dimensions are concerned with for example a commitment to providing equal opportunities for all pupils. The elements are not, however, statutory like the foundation subjects and religious education, which are thus the priority for implementation. Some British commentators on the National Curriculum remark the paradox in the situation, where the dimensions of the national curriculum appear to be non-statutory and yet to deliver the statutory requirement of the broad-based relevant curriculum for all requires equal opportunities to be a (the?) major issue of planning (Davies, Mabbott & Thomas, 1992). The themes, dimensions and skills cover important areas of knowledge and understanding, but they may not appear as a coherent whole, especially as the statutory contents of the National Curriculum are overloaded (Hall, 1992).

In a more detailed analysis of references to gender in the British material I have used secondary sources. Many researchers that have examined curricular material have remarked that it lacks coherent addressing to gender. The term 'equal opportunities' is used in at least some of the interim papers, although the subject working groups exhibit vast differences in their attention to and interpretation of equal opportunities (Burrage, 1991; Davies, Holland & Minhas, 1992). However, Davies, Mabbott and Thomas (1992, 143) concluded that within the statutory parts of the documents, it is difficult to find traces of the working parties' thinking on equal opportunities issues. Changes in cultural climate in Britain have taken place in the eighties. Discussion about racism and sexism are far more common and accepted than before. This discussion has managed to influence ideology, if not to persuade policy-makers. (Burton & Weiner 1990, 224; see also Whyld 1990). The discrepancies between the interim papers and statutory documents of ERA may be an example of this.

Examples of the references reveal inconsistencies, but also some awareness of the empirical and theoretical findings of gender studies on education. For example, Davies, Mabbot and Thomas (1992, 143) discuss an interim docu-

ment on Modern Foreign Languages. It has a chapter on equal opportunities. It starts with a sensitive remark: "It must not be assumed, however, that simply exposing pupils to five years of learning will in itself ensure equal opportunity to benefit from the experience" (NCC, 1990 b, 14.2). After that it goes on to consider: how pupils are taught and what they are taught. Other documents contain a few references to gender differences in mathematics and physics. In one of the most central documents it is stated that: "Schools need to take account of and challenge the attitudes present in society which consider that certain subjects are less relevant for girls than for boys." (NCC, 1990 a, 3). In an interim paper of the Working Group of Mathematics attention was also drawn to gender differences in mathematical performance. The responsibility was laid on teachers: "This is however a matter of good teaching practice, rather than something to be taken on board in the construction of the mathematics curriculum itself" (sit. by Burton & Weiner, 1990, 213; Burrage, 1991, 33).

In the curriculum documents that they analysed, Burton and Weiner (1990) found little encouragement for changes oriented towards greater equality, either in the formal or in the hidden curriculum. The conclusion made by many other critics is analogous: while equal opportunities issues and concerns are formally present in the documents, their stature, significance and definition is ambiguous (Davies, Mabbott & Thomas, 1992, 153, see also Arnot, 1989; Kelly, 1990; Miles & Middleton, 1990; Davies, Holland & Minhas, 1992; Riddell, 1992). Where guidance occurs it is in the non-statutory part of the binder, that always appears after and separately from the statutory part (Davies, Mabbott & Thomas, 1992, 144). Most of the teachers obviously do not pay much attention to the non-statutory parts, because the amount of curriculum material is enormous.

Gender in the curriculum contents

Equal opportunities as a cross-curricular dimension should have impact, not only on the methods and organization of the school, but also on the contents of different school subjects. Formerly, gender was most successfully introduced in the curriculum through sociology and as a theme in assemblies (Whyld, 1990, 108). Sociology is not a foundation subject in the new National Curriculum.

However, in the documents of some subjects, it is possible to find a few references to gender. I chose to examine documents of history and careers education, which were the subjects that were studied in more detail also in the Finnish material. In the British National Currriculum, history is one of the foundation subjects, and careers dducation is a cross-cultural theme.

In Britain during most recent decades, the 'traditional' way of teaching history as transmission of a *body of knowledge*, has been challenged by the 'new history' as an *approach to knowledge*, that focuses on student-centred problem solving, the process of historical enquiry, and the interrogation of evidence (McKiernan, 1993, 38). The discrepancy between the two viewpoints dominated the production of the history document of the National Curriculum, and public discussion on it. In the final version, the 'traditional' history with stresses on British history, won the battle (McKiernan, 1993). However, when compared to the Finnish history curriculum, the British version comprises more emphasis on developing skills of analysis and criticism, and measures to evaluate primary source material. Thus it could be used as a subject where gender issues can be regarded in an analytical way.

In a HM Inspectorate's discussion paper on history (DES, 1988 a) gender is mentioned in a section where teaching of history is regarded as related to the other areas of the curriculum: " ... history courses should ensure that women are not 'invisible', that their changing social roles are made clear and that interpretations of the past that demean or obscure their experience are avoided." (DES, 1988 a, 26). In the Final Report of the history Working Group (DES, 1990, 183-184), equal opportunities was addressed coherently in four

paragraphs, in terms of visibility of women and gender issues in the substance of the subject. Women's impact in the macro history is also emphasized: "Women should be studied not only as part of social history (where it is still assumed that they 'belong') but in contexts often treated as exclusively 'male', such as politics, war, commerce, and science." (DES, 1990, 184). In the final document of History (DES, 1991), gender issues can be found embedded in the text although there are no overt mentions. In many instances of the presentation of the themes for the teaching of history, lives of different groups of men, women and family life in different historical periods was suggested.

In Curriculum Guidance for Careers Education (NCC, 1990 c), the themes self, roles, work, career and transition are described. Gender issues are referred to in a few parts of the document. For example, as an example for an activity in the Key Stage 2 (8-11 year olds) was recoding sex and other issues in media representations of work roles (NCC, 1990 c, 20). Gender or equal opportunities was not, however, explicitly addressed in the presentations of contents for careers education.

The impact of the documents in teaching

It is argued, that the National Curriculum has made work for equal opportunities more difficult. This is partly because the support given by the local educational authorities (LEAs) is curtailed and because of the major urgency of implementation of statutory obligations of the National Curriculum. Besides, economic cuts and the increased pressure to prepare student teachers for delivering and assessing the National Curriculum challenge teacher educators, who have formerly integrated issues of gender and equal opportunities in their teaching (Sidgwick, Mahony & Hextall, 1993). The agenda for teacher education is now clearly to be far more on classroom management skills, assessment procedures and on familiarity with the content of the new National Curriculum. In such courses critical reflection is in great danger of being downgraded, squeezed out, or omitted (Hill, 1990, 20).

The optimistic view is that the liberal tradition of curriculum work in schools is not easy to cut down. While examining the implementation of the National Curriculum in four schools Ball & Bowe (1992) have remarked, that different capacities, contingencies, commitments and histories of institutions have their impact on how it is implemented. " ... the National Curriculum remains both the object and subject of struggles over meaning. It is not as much being 'implemented' in schools as being 'recreated', not so much 'reproduced' as 'produced. While schools are changing as a result, so too is the National Curriculum." (p. 113-114). The schools and teachers that are committed to equal opportunities will try to continue their practices, and even use National Curriculum and Educational Reform Act. Mahony (1992) argues, that ".... in providing their own interpretations of the legislation, teachers have found hooks on which they hang their 'Equal Opportunities' hats, creatively exploiting every opportunity whether in: the Act itself; the documentation within particular subject areas; the legislation concerning the responsibilities and duties of Governing Bodies" (p. 294).

The differences between pessimistic and optimistic views are related to the emphasis given to structures vs agencies; to what extent is local resistance as a form of policy-in-use possible against the intended policy of the state? Lingard (1993), using evidence from Australia, is more pessimistic than Ball and Bowe. He argues against the post-structuralist theorizing (such as Ball's and Bowe's) and maintains that the state remains important for understanding the present and in terms of political strategy.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 SUMMARIZING SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The above descriptions of context reveal differences between Britain and Finland. There are differences both in the post-war policies of curriculum development and of equal opportunities in education, and in the actual situation of girls in education. The view that girls' educational needs should be understood in the context of their future role as wives and mothers was held in Britain longer than in Finland. Overt discrimination and under-recruitment of girls in education was more evident in post-war Britain than in post-war Finland. In Finland, relatively equal educational participation and good achievement of girls was a reality before the issue of gender equality in education was internationally raised in the late sixties. This was largely brought about by the needs of the labour market: women were used as a "reserve army of labour" while policy closed the doors for immigration. Women in Finland have worked outside the home more often than in the other countries, often of necessity (e.g. Pohls 1990).

Compared with Britain in the eighties, curriculum in the Finnish comprehensive school is not greatly gender segregated. One of the major differences between the school systems of Finland and Britain lies in the role of assess-

ment in the education of under 16's. This must have some impact in the role of equal opportunities in both countries.

In Finland, the centralized tradition of curriculum development has not given much room for grass-roots projects. In the eighties, governmental bodies initiated the concern about gender equality in education while the question was not raised by professionals in the field. In Britain, the tradition of schools' and teachers' autonomy and decentralized curriculum have provided possibilities for school-based curriculum innovation. In the seventies and eighties, numerous small scale initiatives were set up by teachers and schools under the umbrella of equal opportunities. They relied more often upon teachers' voluntary effort and commitment than upon governmental funding.

In Britain, female participation and achievement in education have progressed strongly during the last decades. In Finland, the former relatively higher level of female participation and achievement has remained without significant changes. However, in both countries, gender differentiation within the fields of education has prevailed.

Both in Finland and in Britain, girls and boys tend to choose differently whenever there is a possibility to choose. This is, at least partly, due to the fact that choices are usually made in the context of assumptions that they are 'natural' (see Riddell, 1992). In Britain, the National Curriculum will limit the range of options, but different courses within subjects still exist. It is still possible to choose between double or single sciences or between different courses within technology and the choice will be biased by gender. Today, the tendency in Finland is towards more possibilities to choose.

The impact of curricular choice is not easy to evaluate from gender perspective. When Arnot (1989) examines the impact of the new core curriculum of the British National Curriculum, she argues, that while a common curriculum is a necessary, it is not a sufficient condition to break down educational inequalities. It is not that pupils are taught vastly different sorts of curricula, but rather that a common curriculum, 'effectively' taught, will itself be a biased form of education. The invisibility of women in history books, that is documented in my research (Lahelma, 1992) gives an example of sexist

elements within the common curriculum. It is also evident that lack of choice in curriculum might mean that male option is made the norm. However, the case of Finland suggests that even minor differences in subject choices can be used as entrance criteria to further education (see above).

In my analysis of curriculum documents of the Finnish comprehensive school, I tried to explore to what extent references to teaching methods and contents take into account gender and the aims of equality. The examples suggest the authors' difficulties in interpreting the goal of promoting equal opportunities. I concluded that gender neutrality has been the method chosen to promote equal opportunities, although not systematically. Attempts have been made to escape stereotypical sex role labels by speaking neutrally about pupils instead of boys and girls. When gender issues are addressed, however, the references are more likely to confirm the status quo than to provide users with initiatives to change the contents and practices of teaching. Gender neutrality in documents does not result in school practices that challenge gender inequalities: it fosters existing insensitivity to such inequalities. Neither does it call for subject contents that include and validate the experience of girls and women. Because of the formal equality, the 'myth' that actual equality has been achieved lives in Finnish curriculum material and in school text books.

Analogous research on the documents of the National Curriculum in Britain reveals a slightly different situation. Although there are inconsistencies among the British references, they lack obvious stereotypical misunderstandings. There is more sensitivity to gender issues than in the Finnish material. The sensitivity is not, however, evident in the curriculum documents. Where references are made to equal opportunities, scant attention is paid to the large body of British research indicating the nature of sexism within the educational institutions. Equal opportunities issues and concerns are formally present in the documents, but their stature, significance and definition is ambiguous.

In the documents of both countries it is stated that equal opportunities should permeate the whole curriculum. It is left to teachers and schools to find their own way forward. Neither the British nor the Finnish documents provide teachers with guidelines or suggestions that would help them to find methods

for eliminating stereotyping or encouraging girls and boys to broaden their scope. The policy shows an inclination to trust the ability of teachers to act in accordance with the intended policy in this specific issue without further instructions. Evidence, provided by e.g. some research that was referred to in this article, has demonstrated the inadequacy of such an approach; resources and information are needed if changes towards more egalitarian practices and educational contents are aimed for.

4.2 GENDER AND OTHER CATEGORIES OF INEQUALITY

One interesting feature in the analysis of documents of actual policy is the relation of gender to other categories of inequality. In educational policies in Britain, gender, 'race' or ethnicity, and special needs are regarded as the three targets for policies of equal opportunities. In the National Curriculum, where equal opportunities is a dimension, those three categories are mentioned (see e.g. NCC 1990 a). In documents as well as in critiques of the Curriculum, these are often discussed as parallels.

In Finland, one of the ideologies behind the comprehensive reform, the implemantation of which started in 1972, was equality of opportunities. The categories of inequality were then social background, place of residence and gender. Most intensive policies were implemented in order to promote educational possibilities for children from rural areas. These policies were rather successful. In the eighties, perhaps because of the international resolutions, the concept of equal opportunities was most often used in connection with gender. The question of ethnicity has not yet reached the discourse on education, although it is acute in everyday life in many schools. Special education has not been discussed as a question of equal opportunities like it is in the British context.

In the seventies, British feminist researchers argued that gender was ignored in the analysis of working class children's educational disadvantage

(e.g. McRobbie 1980). Later on, researchers of race and gender have maintained, that intersections of these categories are important, problematic and often neglected. For example, Mirza (1992) claims, that for the formerly progressive ILEA (Inner London Educational Authority), "gender was a white issue and race a male issue" (p. 20). Hill (1990, 8) argues that social class egalitarianism has remained very undeveloped by local educational authorities. Reflections on these questions are not visible in curriculum documents.

4.3 RESTRUCTURING OF EDUCATION CONFRONTS THE INTENDED POLICIES OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

In the analysis of educational policies, tendencies like striving towards accountability, centralization, individualism, and closer links between school and industry, are often referred to as the restructuring of education. Restructuring has taken place in most Western countries during the last decade, during a period of expenditure cuts in education (Gordon, 1986; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1987; Hill, 1990; Middleton, 1992; Lingard, 1993). Education is being increasingly conceptualized by policymakers as an economic, rather than a social, political, or moral, activity. Restructuring, as a policy of the New Right, has affected the British educational policy already since the late seventies (e.g. Gordon, 1986; Arnot & Barton, 1992). In Finland, the changes have been more recent, and their impact is not yet fully visible.

In Britain, the National Curriculum has curtailed teachers' former autonomy in curricular decisions while, in the name of accountability and choice, economic decisions have been turned over to schools' governmental bodies where voices of parents and local business have strengthened. In Finland, a process of decentralization in curricular decision making started in the late eighties, followed by new emphasis on accountability and choice (see e.g. Kivinen & Rinne 1992). Delegation of decision making in economic issues has started as well. At the same time, economic cuts in education will be severe

during the next few years. The economic situation has worsened before teachers and schools have learned how to use their new autonomy.

More detailed examination is needed in order to analyse further the impact of decentralization and delegation on policy-in-use. Sleegers and Wessenligh (1993, 52) argue, using Dutch experience, that decentralization is often only the delegation of executive tasks and workload to lower levels and sub-units of education, but not redistribution of genuine power. They refer to Weiler (1990), who claims that arguments for decentralization in political agendas are incompatible with the manifest interest of the modern state in maintaining control. The arguments have, nevertheless, important political utility. The rhetoric of decentralization is linked with an attempt to counterbalance the erosion of the legitimacy of the modern state (see Sleegers and Wessenligh, 1993, 53).

Without going deeper in this analysis, a preliminary comparison between similarities and differences in educational policies in Britain and Finland in the period of restructuring are described in the following chart:

	BRITAIN	FINLAND
CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING	Towards centralization	Towards decentralization
ECONOMIC DECISION MAKING	Delegation to schools	Delegation to schools and local authorities
IDEOLOGY AND RHETORIC	Accountability and choice	Accountability and choice
ECONOMICAL FRAMES	Economic cuts since late 70's	Economic cuts since 90's

In other words, in both countries, independently of the level of curricular centralization, goals of choice and accountability govern educational rhetoric, and while the administration is delegated, expenditure cuts constrain the possibilities of the educational process. The economic situation in Finland has worsened more recently than in Britain.

The status of equality of opportunities is problematic in a situation like this. Middleton (1992, 302) has summarized critics of the new policies. The reforms are seen as placing little emphasis on the idea that a central task of schooling is to build and protect democracy, and that strong measures designed to promote equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups are important in bringing this about. In Finland and in Britain, promoting equal opportunities is mandatory. For example, the Sex Discrimination Act in Britain and the Law of Equal Opportunities in Finland give responsibilities to educational authorities. It is often documented, however, that the concept is difficult and there are many interpretations of the means towards the goal (see e.g. Arnesen & Ní

Chartheigh, 1992). It is not self-evident that equality of opportunities should include equal citizenship (on this discussion, see e.g. Connell, 1992).

We are, moreover, facing changes in intended policies that weaken the emphasis on measures towards equality. In Britain, an overt attack had already been made against the policy of equal opportunities in the eighties. The Secretary of State for Education and Science uttered in a conference in 1988: "the age of egalitarianism is now over" (ref. by Arnot, 1991, 457). In Finland, equality of opportunities is still formally one aspect of intended policy of education. The goal is not, however, even mentioned in the new documents that display the plans for education in the nineties (NBE, 1992; ME, 1993).

In both countries, equality has not been discussed as a dimension of accountability. Hill (1990, 11) argues, that for the Right in Britain, equality and quality do not mix. Upgrading concern for the first has downgraded concern for the second. Equality is, however, one of the criteria of quality in education according to a resolution of the EC: "... the extent to which educational systems effectively deal with issues of equality of opportunity is an important indicator of the quality of the systems themselves." (EC, 1990).

4.4 FROM ACTUAL POLICY TO POLICY-IN-USE

In the introduction of this article I posed a question about the impact of the intended policies of equal opportunities in the actual policy. I have analysed how and in what contexts gender is visible and the theme of equal opportunities taken into account in Finnish and British curriculum documents. I concluded that Finnish curriculum documents are, in most parts, formally gender neutral. In Britain, this is true to a lesser extent. Moreover, the Finnish material also contains stereotypical assumptions about gender differences. The impact of intended policy of equal opportunities on actual policy is, consequently, very limited and contradictory. As we saw above, the era of restructuring will further limit the emphasis on equality.

But what is the relation of the intended policy to policy-in-use? Would a strong emphasis on equal opportunities in curriculum documents be a necessary and/or a sufficient prerequisite for active involvement in the field? Are the curriculum documents relevant at all? Official curriculum has sometimes been called 'curricular poetry', because there is so little equivalence between its 'ought-to-be world' and the 'to-be world' of school reality (Svingby, 1979). Curriculum documents do not tell much of the everyday life in schools. Middleton (1992, 302) has argued, that studies that rely too heavily on academics' reading of texts can render invisible the everyday conversations, experience and perspectives of people in the schools. Teachers and school administrators are not passively socialized puppets of the New Right, and schools not merely sites where populations are governed through techniques of monitoring, surveillance and regulation. The ways that implementing new policies of education take place are negotiated and transformed at a local level.

With the new tendencies of restructuring, what are the possibilities for teachers and schools to "foster a climate in which equality of opportunity is supported by a whole school policy" (NCC, 1990 a), as the goal is stated in the British National Curriculum?

In both countries, curriculum documents left the responsibility of promoting equality to schools and teachers. There is much evidence that teachers do not regard the question of equal opportunities as their major concern. In a European project where different methods of promoting equal opportunities in teacher education were developed (The TENET -project) the following results were described by the project co-ordinator. Awareness of the issue of equal opportunities among the general body of educational personnel is very low. Furthermore, teachers and teacher educators ranked equal opportunities very low in priority on a list of educational issues. Despite their low level of awareness of the problem, teachers considered themselves to be adequately informed and adequately trained in this field. However, while teachers initially hold stereotypical views and behave in a discriminatory fashion in their teaching, they respond to training and can adjust their classroom practices successfully. (Ní Chartheígh, 1989; see also Arnesen & Ní Chartheígh, 1992.)

The evident difference between Finland and Britain is in the tendencies of curricular decision; change from professional autonomy to a centralized national curriculum in Britain and from a centralized curriculum towards decentralization in Finland. In Britain, the grass-roots work for equality has a long history. The tradition of teacher's autonomy has helped it, and the apparent discrimination against girls in education has made it easy for many teachers to realize the problem. Now, with the National Curriculum, this work faces difficulties. However, the optimistic view is that the liberal tradition of curriculum work in schools is not easy to stamp out. The schools and teachers that are committed to equal opportunities will try to continue their practices. It will not be an easy task. The lack of institutional support, together with the economic difficulties and changes in teacher education, will worsen the possibilities for anti-sexist work.

It is, however, not very easy to see even the impact of the former innovations on equal opportunities on 'ordinary' schools. Arnot (1991) argues that not much change has taken place. In my pilot study in British schools, 13 of the 16 teachers from two secondary schools who volunteered to answer to my questions on equal opportunities regarded their knowledge base on the issue sufficient. Their answers to my other questions, however, revealed that most of them had not thought about the issue very much.

In Finland, the policy has been to integrate the obligation of promoting equal opportunities into education through centralized resolutions. The intended goal is not, however, visible in the actual policies. Decentralization of curricular decision does not lead to more conscious initiatives towards anti-sexist education, if there are not enough active teachers in the field. As was indicated above, the current Curriculum Framework does not give strong support to teachers to promote equality. On the contrary, it supports those who will maintain the status quo or who do not see gender as an educational issue. The next curriculum framework will have much less guidance altogether; the first draft did not include any single mention of equal opportunities or gender. While resources are dwindling, teachers' in-service education on equal opportunities is not the first choice for school governing bodies.

In Sweden, where state policy of equal opportunities has been more effective than in Finland, Zachari (1992) argues, that in a decentralized school system new methods of working for equal opportunities are needed.

4.5 CHALLENGES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Sociology of education has often been criticized about the split between macro-analysis of educational policies and small-scale studies of individual interaction patterns (e.g. Whitty, 1985; Hammersley, 1992). Splitting social life into hierarchical levels makes it difficult to conceptualize change as a dynamic process involving both structures and human agents (Shilling, 1992). The next question to be answered is: How do gender neutral educational policies translate into gender specific processes and practices on the school level? This is a challenge for the research project "Citizenship, difference and marginality in schools - with special reference to gender" (Gordon, 1993). In the research we plan to move from comparative, cross-cultural large-scale questions of national differences in education to the processes and practices in schools.

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